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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women
and to the special session of the General Assembly
entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development
and peace for the twenty-first century"**

Statement presented by General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* E/CN.6/2005/1.



Statement

"Women hold up half the sky" was an often-quoted saying at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. This Chinese saying has a great deal of truth as women make up about half the world population. But as those who work with women know, getting support for these women who hold up the sky is not easy. It is something that we must work together on or all of us will soon be crying, "The sky is falling; the sky is falling!"

Not only do women—and the girls who will soon be women—need support, but they need empowerment so that they can better solve their own challenges; and women can best solve most of those challenges themselves. To be able to do this they need the help of all organizations, such as the United Nations, NGOs, churches and religious organizations, and governments. The rewards in improved quality of life for all people will make it well worth the effort.

One of the challenges facing women is education. This ranges from the most basic ability to read and write, and the opportunity to stay in school, to having access to advanced education, including education in the issues of life women face. It has been shown that:

- * Educated women have fewer children
- * Educated women marry later
- * Educated women have decreased maternal mortality
- * An educated wife and mother results in improved family health
- * Education leads to decreased infant mortality
- * Educated women have a greater sense of personal self-worth
- * Educated women have increased earning capacity and productivity
- * Children of educated mothers do better in school
- * Educated women are better able to instill high moral values in their children

It is for this reason that the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, particularly through its Department of Women's Ministries, and through other Church entities as well, has developed programs to benefit women and the girl child.

Literacy

Female illiteracy is linked to low social status and poverty. Limited access to knowledge and female illiteracy have been shown by UNICEF to be powerful correlates of infant and child mortality. Illiteracy costs governments and businesses money. While not all illiterates are women, most are.

- * In the United States of America each year, businesses hire one million new workers who cannot read, write, or count. During the time it takes to teach them, their employers lose \$30-45 billion in productivity.
- * Currently, 30% of all large US companies offer remedial education. Over the next decade, that figure will climb to 65%.

So what do we do about this? We can begin with the children. We must generate an environment for literacy, for education of girls and women. We must educate fathers and husbands to the benefits of allowing girls to gain the maximum education and help them realize the improved potential of an educated wife and mother. We must then find ways to help women who seemingly have missed the opportunity for education to make up for lost time.

For these reasons, the Adventist Church supports one of the largest education programs around the world, offering equal education to boys and girls. An atmosphere of education is promoted in the churches. And Women's Ministries has a scholarship program specifically for women, most of whom live in what are referred to as developing nations.

The Church also has literacy programs in many parts of the world: Cambodia, the Philippines, India, Brazil, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Togo, Rwanda, South Africa, and the United States, to name a few. After receiving the benefit of these programs, women have said things such as "I feel like I was blind and now I can see." "Now my grandchildren will not think I am ignorant." "Now the businesses and bosses will not be able to cheat me any more. I can read and write."

Health

The problem of HIV/AIDS and its effect on women around the world is too staggering to be ignored. According to the World Health Organization, 19.2 million women were living with HIV/AIDS in 2002. One of the problems we face is educating women about the truth and myths regarding HIV/AIDS. As a result of this, the Adventist Church's Women's Ministries Department has produced materials specifically for education. The material, titled "Truth or Consequence: The Story of HIV/AIDS" has been made available to all our world offices as a flip chart for use with small groups, as a PowerPoint presentation, and also as overheads. This material can easily be translated and made available.

Our challenge is to educate women in as many ways as possible on this subject. When we work together, this can be achieved.

Abuse

In October 2002, the Adventist Church—in its Annual Council—voted that the 4th Saturday of August each year be designated as Abuse Prevention Emphasis Day. Several departments at the church world headquarters come together each year to prepare new material that is sent to every Adventist church around the world via the Women's Ministries Department.

Packets have been created that educate women on various topics targeting the perpetrator, the victim, children, and support persons.

Leadership Training

The Adventist Church believes that part of empowering women includes preparation for leadership positions. As a result in 2002 Women's Ministries created a Leadership Certification course that covers three levels and includes 56 seminars over a three-year period. Topics range from effective leadership to professionalism; and include seminars on parliamentary procedure, assessing needs, and finding or developing community resources. This material is appropriate for use with young women as well as more mature women.

All of this leads to empowerment. A woman who has been educated is resourceful, is aware of her rights and how to maintain or gain these rights, and thus realizes she has something to contribute to her family, her community, her church, and her government.

As a faith-based organization, we also believe that empowerment includes a woman's right to choose her own religion. She needs to be educated so that she can make an informed decision, and then be given the right by her family, community and governmental laws to follow her own convictions.

Challenge

As a faith community representing more than 25 million people in 205 countries, the Adventist Church wholeheartedly supports all efforts to improve the quality of life of women in the categories mentioned above, and it will continue to actively work through its congregations, institutions, and organizations to collaboratively achieve these objectives.

Our challenge to the United Nations, NGO's, and other representatives present here today is to develop concrete action plans for empowering today's women and girls and to work in partnerships with local governments and institutions.

Our challenge to you, participant in this conference, is to work together to put aside our religious and racial differences and work towards the common goal of improving the lives of women and girls around the world.
